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WEDDING BELLS OUT OF TUNE,

AND

THE DEVIL'S WIFE

BY

JANET DRAKE

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1918

WEDDING BELLS OUT OF TUNE AND THE DEVIL'S WIFE (An Allegory).

By

Janet Drake.

✠✠✠

New York:
1898
The Republic Press.

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To My dear Uncle James and Aunt Mary - in loving remembrance of the author.

Janet Lake.

May 7th 1898.

DEDICATION.

To my loved husband I dedicate these simple stories, in commemoration of our twenty-fifth Anniversary, as his loving help and encouragement has been the incentive to publish them.

There are depths in our natures that refuse to be explained by language—as one's mind is but a song out of God's dream. He it was whose ready and willing accompaniment helped me to echo MY *first song through the hearts of others, and whose unswerving love and sympathy has been the "key note" of our twenty-five years of wedded peace and happiness. May God prosper him ever, for his tender love and perfect forgetfulness of self say I. Amen.*

CONTENTS.

Page.

WEDDING BELLS OUT OF TUNE..... 1

THE DEVIL'S WIFE..... 77

WEDDING BELLS OUT OF TUNE.

"We twain shall not measure,
"The ways that left us twain."

—SWINBURNE.

WEDDING BELLS OUT OF TUNE.

CHAPTER I.

The snow was gently falling on a sweet New England home, just on the border of a quaint, old-fashioned village. Warm, hospitable lights from well-trimmed lamps shone out from its windows, casting their guiding rays across the soft, white lawn, as if their only aim was to pilot the way to warm, comfortable quarters. Snow blossomed as it was, this little home seemed to have sprung from the wholesome sunshine, and bore evidence of thrifty New England care and energy.

Now and again a sweet face no longer wearing the bloom of youth, but rather the beauty that comes from a conscience whose watchword had ever been duty, would peer out anxiously and coquettishly, as though but twenty of her fifty years had lived in her heart.

So many there are who speculate on what life should be, but only those who wish to enjoy it, are wise enough to take it as they find it, the keynote of Aunt Faith's happy cheer-giving home and youthful heart. Her snow-

white, blue-ribboned cap was donned for an especial occasion, and why not? when Silas Martin, her accepted "steady company," was watched for so lovingly. I say steady, for he found his way to this dear woman's front door often enough to remove all doubts of inquisitive neighbors as to his real intentions. Aunt Faith was too busy a woman to mix much with her associates or join in their pastimes, and, happily, her neighbors were few—but if there was any real work to be accomplished or aching heads or hearts to soothe—there she remained until health and happiness were restored, as restored they always appeared to be under her magic.

The tolling of the vesper bells from the tower of the little church over the frost-laden air, meant naught to her by its summons, as she long ago had ceased to commune at its prim altar, not from disrespect or neglect, but rather from a mental progress, an uplifting from her narrow surroundings, owing to a small, but well-chosen library (partly religious) a legacy from her father who came a stranger to this village, later falling in love with and wedding her mother.

Surely she must have inherited from some far-away ancestor her many-sided and all-around views, to which was added a mind capable of

superior development. Her quiet New England manners and appearance, together with her real common sense—uncommon sense she would have it—seemed strangely out of keeping, and her keen sense of humor manifested itself when she had been heard to remark that "New England people seemed to think that nothing angered God so much as a new idea."

This giving up of church influence won for her home the name of "back-sliding cottage," misnomer though it was, for its owner was forging on faster and faster toward the real problem of life.

She did bravely what she thought best, and found solace in working *outside* the church that had only held her a discontented member.

Her's was certainly a contradictory character, living in advanced thought as she did, and loving so fondly old kindly Silas Martin, one of the village stand-bys and helping hand in her charities. He had never taken any interest in the little church, nor could he be induced to worship there, which some thought one of the strongest reasons for Aunt Faith's leaving it, to, as she hoped, accomplish better results in his salvation.

The giving up of her church worship, which

had served to break the spell of monotony that she lived in, grieved her, but a sense of utter repugnance to its narrow views and limited benefit to her spiritual requirements, compelled her to seek something she could find peace with, which was no small task considering the few things at hand to suggest remedy. As she was not the woman to forget her earlier teachings in the light of later developments, nor her duties to her loving Master who had sacrificed so much for her, she with her own hands (oh, yes! Silas', too) fashioned in the sunny corner of the little living room (which all well-regulated New England houses have) an altar, very primitive, though quaintly in keeping with its surroundings; sanctified by her loving inception and creation, with a dear old prie-dieu cast out from the village church in the more ambitious moments of the elders. A little chancel encircled it, adorned with pots of fragrant, tenderly nurtured flowers; sweet morning glories clambered over its sacred shrine until they reached a rough-hewn cross and clung caressingly, awakening every morning with a grateful prayer to be only found nestling there still closer at eve. An old family Bible lay always open, easy of access, and a well-worn but scruplously clean home-woven mat

rested beneath, on which many a prayer for her fellow-beings had been breathed. This sweet, sacred nook filled the place in Faith's heart of the little church whose bells were clanging so dictatorially this snow-fallen evening in December.

Turning to Mandy, her helping maid and friend, she said:

"Mandy, I wonder what keeps Silas Martin tonight? He hasn't missed Sunday night's prayers since he first knew their precious benefit."

For the untiring little woman had persuaded Silas at last to worship with her at their mutual shrine.

"Do you suppose, Mandy, that Deacon Maybie has converted him before I could see him again? Silas is so uncertain, Mandy."

And even to Mandy she would not admit how uncertain or difficult to understand this same Silas was, for she loved him devotedly and knew that her love was returned, for he kept "steady company," though his never having broached the subject of matrimony puzzled her, as she had made it most plain that this wholesome home needed a master pretty badly, without any apparent executive effect upon him, and, hint as

she might, had arrived at no nearer accomplishment of her purpose.

"Well, mum, you needn't be a fearin' of Silas Martin; he ain't the one to be a-told what to think, as he is the sort of man that does a sight of thinkin' for himself, for his comin' a-courtin' you, Miss Faith, shows his good sense."

"Faithful, honest Mandy, to say what you really mean—so few do, Mandy."

This last after watching a surprised look on Mandy's face.

A shadow fell across the path, and Faith darted back with beating heart, hastening to the old horse-hair sofa, worn out in the service of her numerous ancestors, she and Silas not being slow to add to its history. Into its unresponsive shelter she sank and commenced to knit most vigorously some mittens for Silas, intended to ward off the bitter frosts of the relentless weather.

He entered unannounced, so familiar was he in this dear home. Mandy, wreathed in smiles, walked to her domain, whistling to "Sandy," Aunt Faith's trusty old dog, so that no eyes should "keep tabs" on their greeting.

"Well, Faith, I'm late, be'nt I? Nora Ann Danvers' little boy is sick with the bronchitties, and there was no one to sit with him when his

ma' went to meetin', so I stayed and took care on him, and his dear little patient face, Faithie, fully repaid me for a-makin' so great a sacrifice in not bein' with you sooner." Silas Martin's continued adherence to the dialect had at one time distressed her, but as his sweet, good qualities cropped out each day she had overcome all desire to have any one thing changed.

"Well, Si, I am glad that you remained, but think it would have been a deal better for Nora Ann Danvers to have stayed at home and done her little Christian act there, than to have gone to meeting to see if Polly still wore that cloak with the chinchilly."

"Oh, Faithie, you don't mean that; it don't seem a bit like you."

"Yes, I do mean it, Si; I know Nora Ann Danvers, and my heart aches for her little folks. They are bright lads, and want happy thoughts to cheer them instead of being nagged with meeting houses, and tracts that she herself wouldn't read for all the world. They are worth raising, those boys, and I would like that task myself, so I can't understand her neglect of them; that is not God's religion, Si. I only have Sandy—faithful old dog—and Darby and Joan

(two cats so named to suggest to Silas a condition of things that would be wholly agreeable to their mistress, and whose lives had been a ray of sunshine in their marital contentment since they wended their way to her for sympathy and protection); oh! and I mustn't forget my dear Spot (a parrot given her by a blind musician in remembrance of her tender nursing of him two years before), and, glancing mischievously at Si, said: "I called him Spot because he so persistently sits on one. These, with my faithful servant Mandy, form the ties which keep me young and contented, and I don't need any meeting house to teach me my duty to them, either. Some people find excuse in chloroforming their consciences, Si, but that is not healthy, and brings no fulfillment of happiness to the one who does it."

"Well, you have to admit, Faithie, that Nora Ann Danvers is a great church woman—goes three times on Sunday and to all the meetin's."

"Yes, that she does, Si, and leaves her sick boy for strangers to look after. That woman is all creeds, Si; she says *this* is her creed, and *that* is her creed, until, between you and me, Si, I don't think she knows what she does believe. Creeds are the one subject of dissention in

churches, and give one no real idea of the beauties of Christianity. I don't want to cast stones at this woman, Si, or judge her; but I have watched her now for years, and felt that the responsibility of motherhood was too sacred a one to be wasting time in struggling to have Deacon Maybie twice more a year to tea than her neighbors do, or in making new book marks continually, with 'God is love' on them, when she doesn't ever let Him get near enough to her to find out whether He *is* or not. Of course, I don't know what it is to be a mother, but I have my own ideas of what a mother should be. Some of the bravest battles ever fought, Si, were fought by the mothers of men. It is not what you do for your boy, but what you encourage him to do for himself.

"We ought to live as God's flowers, Si, budding and shedding our smiles, and giving unto our fellow-creatures always our best side, leaving a sweet memory that nothing but beauty and goodness can."

"Well, Faithie, you would have made a powerful preacher, and I reckon 'tain't too late to give this wonderful knowledge of your'n to Deacon Maybie, and perhaps he could keep those people at the little church awake Sundays, and I

wish Nora Ann Danvers could have hearn that as well as me, Faithie, as I feel better already, and think she might want to stay to hum a spell. That boy of her'n is a smart one—he a sufferin' and a-tryin' to make me laugh and forget myself, for he kind a-saw me a-lookin' toward the door watchin' for Nora Ann, and when his ma came in she found him almost well from laughin'. So you see, Faithie, you are right! What boys need is happy thoughts, and there may be somethin' in that faith cure I hearn tell of, since it has brought me around through *my* Faith."

The old man was quite sprucing up. Faith's eloquence had found a responsive chord in his heart, and he wasn't slow to express it.

"Well, Si, that was prettily said, and I feel better myself to have my talk out; I think I will be a new woman now, for it was the one discord in my heart."

And the wonder still grew as to how she had learned it all in her narrow sphere. Just her nobility of soul added to a depth of nature, wasted upon the "desert air" in this limited space.

There are broader fields whose tillage would have yielded richer harvest, could she have been their tiller.

"Well, Faithie, I must be a-goin'; it's growin' late."

It did seem to Aunt Faith that she had left nothing undone to capture her lover to-night and bind him to a contract signed and sealed, but the conduct of men in general found no exception in Silas Martin, as her eloquence had apparently made no winning impression upon him.

"But, Si, haven't you forgotten our Sunday service?"

"No, Faithie, it is the one thing I look forward to."

Silently they joined hands, knelt reverently at their altar, and asked God's blessing and guidance in the performance of their duties, Mandy standing at a distance with bowed head, and Sandy sitting on his hind legs at his mistress' side, as taught by her in her lonely desires for even silent friendship (for, after all, *silent* friendship is a panacea for much), looking out of the corners of his eyes awaiting her solemn "amen," at which sound a joyful leap mutely expressed his promise to increase his efforts to be a good dog.

The other pets were not included in this homely worship, as they were not educated to good behavior. "Spot" was apt at any moment to be in-

discriminating, for, having been tried once, was found wanting, she quite shocking the little home circle by shouting, "Oh, do hurry up; for God's sake, amen," an unfortunate combination of her vocabulary which nipped her spiritual welfare in its youth, as never but once again was she admitted to the living room's sacred privileges.

After Si's good-byes had been repeated again and again, and yards of comforter had made him dizzy by never-ending winding, Aunt Faith lighted him on his way, holding a lamp to guide him to the straight path, a deed which she was performing daily for his spiritual welfare. The several duties of the two lone women, longing for a man's helping hand, were done; an ominous silence followed, as though tired heads found pillowed rest a blessing; the morning glories slept; God's four winds rested caressingly around each corner, loving, silent protectors of the dear home, watching with jealous care its precious inmates.

CHAPTER II.

The following week was uneventfully passed, except, perhaps, that Aunt Faith and Silas Martin had quitted for the nonce their quaint wooing for the fun they had assisting the village belle in becoming John Perkins' bride.

There was great stir and commotion in the village, consequent upon the expected event, and the little church underwent much adornment; every one, friend and foe, assisted in the bridal display, making it a matter of common interest and pride, for such an affair had not taken place with them for many a day.

The bride was tastefully dressed, her three maids of honor the best the village could produce. They were not Aunt Faith's choice, but she thought it more courteous to permit the bride to have some voice in the matter, as to this sweet director had been left the management of most of the plans. She, by the bride's choice, however, was the more confirmed in the belief that she had acted wisely in accepting the task.

No less willing hands than Aunt Faith's dressed the bride, her gifts, besides, being most

generous, while Si aided with head and heart to make up for what he lacked in pocket.

Faith evinced an unusual interest in all the preparations, taking in the smallest details, as though there appeared on the horizon a possibility of a similar ceremony at a little home not far distant, trying to urge Si on as delicately as possible to encourage a proposal, but, whether from unfortunate shyness or an under-estimate of his powers to follow up a proposal by anything like an ability to carry it through, must remain a secret, for the village wedding pased off joyfully and Silas remained as mum as ever on the subject, much to Faith's continued disappointment. It was odd, indeed, that Aunt Faith should be the prime factor and moving spirit in most that occurred in the little village, for its inhabitants had not quite forgiven her for leaving their church and them to the disquieting and disturbing mercies of Orthodoxy, though they finally had to admit her power for good and charitable deeds, which so outshone theirs as to disturb them into jealous awe of her, and cause them by degrees to withdraw the unwise appellation of "back-sliding cottage" from her humble habitation, and thereafter to designate her as the "silent angel." Thus the tradition that hereditary

belief was insurmountable in New England, certainly found no tenable ground here.

No aged cripple or maimed animal was there that did not find Aunt Faith's loving hands ready and willing to serve them. So, by the strength and superiority of her character these simple minds were won over, though the fear at one time that all the younger generation would become dissenters from the little church which had taught them their childish Catechism, and, according to their views, to be unlearned in the light of the "silent angel's" teachings was a disturbing one—one that suggested most startlingly the "Pied Piper's" cruel offense against parents in the village he rendered so childless.

So, naturally, the young couple starting on their life's journey could look forward to no future prosperity until they had asked and received Aunt Faith's blessing.

"May there be just clouds enough, dear children, o'er your lives to cause a glorious sunset, and may the darkest hour in life be lighted by the sunshine of contentment, and trust always in your Aunt Faith. Amen!"

She found it difficult in the stillness of her room—alone that night—to suppress the longing for a stronger tie than a sweetheart's love;

which had the effect of redoubling her hints to Si, the wedding, no doubt, being largely responsible for the fluttering of her heart strings.

When at last sleep was won her sweet countenance bore traces of tears, which were later kissed away by God's messengers, bearing promise of a happier and brighter future.

"FLOWER LOVES."

One day I found a Marguerite.
I said to her, "My dainty sweet,
Of all the flowers, wild and drest,
Which one do you like the best?"
In accents low she murmured mild—
It seemed to me I saw her smile:
"If choose I must, the William sweet."
Thus spoke the dainty Marguerite.

But do not think my curious mind
Was then content—I went to find
A William sweet and said, "Confess—
Which flower do you like the best?"
He said, "The Marguerite 'tis named."
So thus I learned that William sweet
Had won the heart of Marguerite.

CHAPTER III.

Spring had come at last in all its glory, and the vine-clad cottage was the prettiest bower one could well imagine, passers-by stopping in wonder to gaze at its beauties.

The sun shone out from a cloudless sky on the flowers budding and glowing in their unconscious beauty; the green meadows lay off in distant space daintily flecked with Marguerites, their Sweet Williams in close proximity, all nature suggesting the mating of lovers' hearts. Near the front door in verdant grandeur grew a great elm tree, its overhanging branches shielding and protecting Faith's home, welcoming all to its hospitable shade. This old tree and Aunt Faith had grown in the lapsing years to resemble one another in character and to seemingly join in loving interest, to deserve alike the name "Silent Angel."

Any day one might have seen dear Aunt Faith with helpful Mandy weeding and sowing her garden, preparing in anticipation of some coming occasion, Sandy by her side approving in his doggy way, Darby and Joan sporting about making merry over the sweet Springtide and its promise of catnip galore.

"Although, let me tell you," mewed Joan, "as night falls and our feet are wet with early dews the shelter of that dear old kitchen is most welcome; with the tempting supper never forgotten by dear Mandy at the open door, that we may not soil her white sanded floor; for we are well behaved in our home, where no rules are laid down for us, but each performs his part toward the welfare of all in grateful recognition of the one who calls us hers."

Day after day Aunt Faith toiled to cultivate her garden and soul by planting seeds of rare value, and as the Spring deepened into mellow Summer, and all nature had mated, her longing to become Mrs. Martin overcame her maidenly reserve, and she determined to make Silas ask her what she knew he was eager to, but for some hidden reason was delaying. However, a faint suspicion that shyness was in a measure responsible, led her to set a day for herself, resolved to bring things to a business understanding.—Sunday, to her thinking, the most hallowed time for such a plighting.

The next day, the one assigned, found her in a flutter of excitement, which Mandy and her pets tried hard to reconcile in a woman usually so

calm, but they most respectfully forbore any questioning on the subject.

Poor Si, too, had done more genuine thinking since the bridal event than his brain had ever before been taxed by, and it appeared to be working Aunt Faith's way as he concluded the following Sunday should witness the avowal of his proposal, falling curiously upon the day of Aunt Faith's choice, but the burning question now was, how best to accomplish his purpose.

Both minds so firmly bent upon the same object bore fruit, as you will see:

CHAPTER IV.

Mandy was bustling around in her clean white kitchen preparing the Sunday night tea, which was to win Silas Martin and surpass all others in that line, while Aunt Faith, with evidently something on her mind she wished to impart to Mandy, moved nervously about determining the best means of doing so, and, after repeated efforts, she exclaimed, in a conscious, hesitating way:

"Mandy, you set the table to-night while I make the biscuit."

As it usually devolved upon Aunt Faith to put the finishing touches to the pretty, hospitable board, Mandy naturally wondered at the change of duties, and eyed her most suspiciously, without an inkling, however, of her real purpose, but, having learned to accept much of late that she did not understand in her dear mistress, she remained silent.

Aunt Faith *had* a private reason for preparing the biscuit to-night, the desire to accomplish a loving suggestion to Si without Mandy's knowledge, and with what success will be shown

later, for hadn't she determined that this very night she would be asked to become Mrs. Silas Martin, or would be acquainted with facts regarding the situation.

There was no austere, doubting parent to inquire into his intentions, or wedding bells would have pealed long before; so upon her rested the responsibility of holding him to a strict accounting for the past few years' courtship and its final object.

Sunday night teas, she had been told, were fetching in their influence upon men, but hers evidently had been found wanting in the tonic effect to give courage.

Looking closely at the biscuit one might have discovered that the idea was to have them *heart-shaped*, which looked most businesslike and convincing in intent and purpose, and, leaving her for a moment in the enjoyment of her secret pleasure, we will follow Si Martin.

There was great preparation on with Si, as since his courage had gained the day he couldn't wait for Sunday to come to have the ordeal over.

This good old New Englander possessed a strong vein of romance in his composition, and when the fated day arrived, after as careful a toilet as he ever made, he wandered along the road-

side gathering flowers, whistling to keep his courage up.

He neared the dear old home that had become so necessary to his future happiness, and, plucking a daisy, he resorted to the never-failing test of true lovers—"she loves me, she loves me not"—to reassure himself, and as the final petal tallied *not*, he eagerly sought the missing talisman to contradict so blasting a fate.

Where was his boasted courage as he approached the open door (Aunt Faith's gentle soul knowing no fear) and struck on the old brass knocker? their prearranged signal to bring her quickly from any part of the house to him, for it resounded like a death knell to his beating heart, and he started to retreat, but "too late," as Faith, with her sweet curls, rushed eagerly to meet him in response to the well-known summons.

There he stood in the doorway, with his bunch of flowers, dressed with so much care that even Aunt Faith could not doubt its purport, muttering to himself, "Brace up, Silas Martin, a pound of pluck is worth a ton of luck. No man is so strong or so great that he isn't afraid of somebody, and that somebody is often a woman."

CHAPTER VI.

After supper fulfilled its pleasant mission, as Silas always had his body as well as mind fully sustained here, he felt he could brave the coming ordeal, and, adjourning to the living room, they sought the old fateful sofa for lovers, both realizing the approach of the trying moment, and each conscious of a feeling of restraint, while Aunt Faith coquettishly withheld all sign of encouragement.

After a short silence Si ventured the everyday remark:

"He had heard the neighbors had called upon her lately."

"Well, I should thing they had," she said. "Called upon me for most everything in the house."

Then another interval of silence.

"Si, don't you believe in conversation?"

"My mother never believed in educatin' children in conversation; she believed in educatin' them to keep their mouths shut."

"Well, Si, your ma' must have been proud of her success with you. You remind me of the man the first part of whose life was passed learning *to* talk and the latter half how *not* to."

Silas smiled good-naturedly, but still remained silent, which so piqued Aunt Faith that she blurted out:

"*Now, Silas Malbury Martin, have you anything to say to me in particular or have you not?*" and being pushed to it so suddenly he lost ground and stammered:

"No, Faithie, nothin' in particular."

"Well, your remark, Silas Martin, sags in the middle and wants propping up on both ends, doesn't it?"

"Isn't that a cute way to tell a man he ain't a-speakin' the truth, Faithie?"

"Why dont you say what you mean, then, Si?"

" 'Tain't worth quarrelin' about, is it, Faithie?" Turning forgivingly, and roguishly looking him in the eye, she asked:

"Do you think Adam and Eve's first quarrel was as to which should get the *core* of the fateful apple?"

Si not having made any deeper study of Biblical things than a Sunday-school Catechism and Aunt Faith's sweet home chancel with the cling-

ing morning glories, was reluctant to display his ignorance upon so abstruse a subject.

Receiving no reply, Faith came to his aid, as she always did by settling the momentous question, saying:

"In my opinion, whichever got it was the one to blame for causing all the miseries of poor mortals here below, for didn't he eat the seeds?" and then they fell to musing how so small an affair as an apple playing an unfriendly trick upon a pair could have evolved so much unhappiness, it being certainly *fruitful* enough to have brought better results.

More silence, then a plunge to the point. "Faithie, what was it Deacon Maybie said to John Perkins when they got hitched—they must solemnly swear they would hang together for all comin' time, that she should 'nuss' him in sickness and be square to him in health, and be an honest, up and up wife to him?"

"Yes," interrupted Faith, "and *he* must be faithful, good, and obey."

"No, Faithie, I didn't hearn anything like that in the service."

"Well, that is the way I've changed it in my book, Si."

He let that pass, as he had learned by experi-

ence that living up to rule and precept had its loopholes of escape.

"Then didn't you ever hear that God said it warn't well for man to be alone, Faithie?"

"Yes, Si, often; but I would like to wager that he never said anything about it not being good for woman to be alone, for he knows precious well that most of them would be much better off if they were."

"Faithie! (trying another tack), I've laid awake nights a-thinkin' of you."

The perverse little woman replied in a saucy way that she would have to look around to find him a place as night watchman, as she had heard that was a sure cure for folks who couldn't sleep.

"No need for that, Faithie (this said so resignedly), for I have been night watchin' now for a long time, and watchin' the morn to come, too, Faithie, and a prayin' to God, and a-repeatin' over and over again these few words—'Faithie, will you be my own, true, loving wife?'—until I think I can say them now if you'll only give me a chance."

Aunt Faith's heart leaped to her throat in her eager desire to give it to him then and there, and Si, feeling that to be understood in time of need is the safeguard of us all, edged up to her

on the sofa with an impetuosity which only the slippery surface of such a friendly ally to his purpose could have aided him so successfully in doing.

He tried to possess her hand, but she was not ready yet to ackuowledge herself won, which urged him on still the more.

"A good wife is a strong anchor to a man, Faithie, and I hope you'll like the name o' Martin; it isn't as pretty as some, but it's an honorable one, and never brought disgrace to any one in these parts who had the good fortune to bear it. Though what's in a name, Faithie?"

"Not much, Si, so I can't quite understand why you want me to forget mine and live to remember yours."

In answer he kissed her cheek, so bold had he become, thanks to her sauciness. She sprang from him as playfully as a young girl, but he still retained her hand, caught in passing, while Mandy's hasty step put to flight any reciprocation on Aunt Faith's part.

"Tell me, Faithie; give me an answer, little woman."

"No, I can't now, Si, don't you hear Mandy coming?"

They hurriedly sought different chairs, as

Mandy respectfully reminded them of the lateness of the hour. "Arter nine, mum, and the children all ready for prayers (speaking at least two for herself).

Aunt Faith glanced at Si with the satisfaction that is born of the mutual possession of a secret, but with no sign to him as to what their future relations were to be.

Quietly acting upon Mandy's suggestion, she invited Si to join her in prayer at their altar, but oh! so different to-night!

"Sandy," with a most conscious look, awaited with proper dignity his dear mistress' amen, Mandy in the rear with head bowed, and Darby and Joan purring their own anthem.

Prayers over and all expecting the "amen" which meant dismissal, were destined to wait, as Aunt Faith, turning to Si, her dear face wreathed in smiles, her right hand extended, looked into his eyes and repeated, "Until death do us part. Amen!"

Thus these two long-waiting, patient souls plighted their troth at the foot of the cross, with Mandy, Sandy, Darby and Joan and the moonlight for witnesses, and the morning glories still sleeping.

She arose, fastened a flower in his old-fash-

ioned coat, kissed it (for his eyes alone as a peace offering), and gently said:

"There is your kiss back, Si; good-night, and may God watch over thee; amen!"

There slept within that dear, Christian home a happy, contented heart that night—a very small house will sometimes cast long shadows—and as the moonlight rested lovingly on Aunt Faith's shingled roof, a passer-by would be convinced by its generous light that it was a king's palace instead of a quaint old maiden's nest.

CHAPTER V.

"Well, Si, you are early to-night; the vesper bells have just finished ringing."

"Yes, Faithie, I had so much to tell you that I came earlier than usual."

A slight flush on the dear cheek was the only indication that she realized her great wish might become a reality at last, and to her the thought arose, perhaps she had been unnecessarily foolish with those biscuit after all, and would gladly have recalled her over-zeal had it not been that Mandy already, through curiosity "to the manor born," had made a discovery, and, with a most conscious "giving-herself-away" look, informed Aunt Faith aside that her biscuit hadn't "*riz one bit.*"

Faith mentally rejoiced that faithful Mandy was the only one possessed of her secret, and asked that she make some fresh buttered toast instead.

Her mind relieved on that score, turning to Silas she said:

"Well, Si, what have you to say to-night more important than usual? Is there any news in the village, or do the neighbors want me to do them a service?"

"No, Faithie, but there was a dyin' man this mornin' who needed your sweet counsel, but I bein' there at the time, and wantin' to save you the pain I knew it would cause you, gave 'm, for your sake, as much comfort as I could. You know, I can't say things like you do, Fathie, but my heart helps me out a heap.

"It would have grieved you, dear, to see that man a-dyin' without any God in his heart, no lookin' forward to nothin' but just darkness. I thought that way once, too, Faithie, but you have made me what I am, and I wouldn't change now for all the wealth of the world, without my belief tacked onto it."

"How can an intelligent soul think like that, Si, do you suppose?"

No answer, as Si was too deep in wonderment "as to how can it" to reply.

"I am sorry, Si, I didn't speak to him before he died, for I know that I could have brought him comfort—yes, perhaps, belief—before he met his Master for the first time. It is so much better to meet Him as friends, Si, so *much* better,

you avoid all explanations, as you understand Him and He you at sight."

Neglecting, in her never-ending desire to convert Silas, to avail of the opportunity she had so long yearned for, she burst forth:

"Why was the soul so large if this life was all? If you were told that all the great efforts and ambitions of men were to satisfy the wants of a day, and were then of no further use, what would an intelligent mind say to that? Can it be, then, that the soul of man will live just long enough to find out that it can *do* something and then be told that it shall never have a chance to *do* this something?

"Why build a steamer to fulfill the grand mission she does, Si, if there is nothing more for her to do than make her trial trip, forever to remain idle at her anchorage, and later to sink and rot?

"Apply this to the soul, Si," for now the dear woman became most enthusiastic in her desire to go on as her lover seemed so enchained by her eloquence. "Yes," she repeated, "apply this to the soul. This short life of ours is only a trial trip, and we pass by a few buoys in the harbor of eternal life. Shall we anchor at the grave? No, Si, we were made for eternity, and the great, longing ambitions which throb in our souls *can-*

not be stilled by the limitations of the grave.

"Far better to live up to this faith, Si, than to accept the creed of the non-believer, who has naught but oblivion for his recompense in living a virtuous life."

Si was wondering by this time how Deacon Maybie could possibly get a soul to listen to him when there was such a priestess of divinity so near at hand, who, encouraged by Si's rapt attention, watched most attentively the dawning of these truths upon his theretofore sleeping mind, and, at his urgent request, she continued:

"Why can't people see God's promise visible in all things? No matter how great the invention of man, he must never lose sight of the fact of the great Being who is the author of his success.

"We rely upon ourselves too much, Si, thinking in our egotistical way that each day's discoveries in the school of life are owing to our own efforts, overlooking the gentle though Supreme Being who guides and fits us in His own good time to be the interpreters of His unfathomable greatness. We depend too much upon ourselves, Si, as all comes from Him who created us, and can be taken away in the twinkling of an eye."

For a moment Si feared his errand a fruitless one, as he felt himself too unworthy to link his poor, useless life with hers; but a cheery smile and Mandy's breezy entrance to announce supper brought him once more to his material senses, feeling he could do justice to Mandy's efforts displayed so temptingly before him. Cut glass, in shining brilliance, lay scattered here and there on a polished mahogany table, whose surface reflected most generously laden the fruits of Aunt Faith's and Mandy's skill, with a dainty centre piece matching in its pinkness the mother's cups she had thus far guarded so jealously from careless fingers, and rare bits they were, with their pink buds entwined with blue "lover's knots."

Broiled chicken, done to a nicety, delicately pink-tinted ham, garnished with parsley from Aunt Faith's garden, which, I reckon, no one ever saw the like; pot cheese, fashioned in pretty *heart shape*, done in silent and touching sympathy by Mandy for Aunt Faith's disappointment in her biscuit; jam, cakes, buttered toast, which a king's ransom couldn't purchase; fragrant tea, with a cheery silver kettle, boiling in eager willingness for the famished pair. Remember that Mandy was as anxious to have a master as the

rest of the household, which would serve to explain her careful and elaborate preparation, and could you but interpret "pussy lore" you would have heard Darby say to Joan, "Sandy and I will now have some one to understand us more fully, as there is nothing like having a man in the house to go to in the hour of need."

It was a scene of peace and contentment, with Si Martin at the head of the table, Aunt Faith opposite, "Sandy" in his accustomed seat, his place set with as much care and detail as the others (playing "gooseberry" he confided to Darby later), Darby and Joan on the hearth, and Spot in the flower-scented window—peaceful, save, perhaps, the discordant sound of Spot's uncanny jargon in response to Aunt Faith's effort to encourage her in giving, for Silas' benefit, her wonderful singing of the first two bars of the celebrated wedding march, but her children were no exception to the time-honored rule, and Spot remained silent.

Through the sweet, fresh muslin curtains blew the perfume of a thousand flowers, while the bells tolled on the sweet June air for evening prayers. Aunt Faith's blessing was pronounced and Silas' amen reached the ear—it was a picture long to be remembered.

CHAPTER VII.

Preparations for Aunt Faith and Silas' wedding day were quietly progressing. No guests were bidden to the marriage; only the little family whose lives were so interwoven with theirs.

There was no one to be consulted but themselves, and that being so unanimous, was carried without further consideration.

Mandy and the children were to be congratulated for their tactful behavior when informed of the coming event, as had they not made the kitchen walls the recipient of their sleepy confidences these many Sunday nights, and did they not surmise something out of the ordinary from Aunt Faith's delayed "amen" that Sunday night? But Faith was too much absorbed in her coming happiness to give credit where it was really due.

The house was undergoing its usual cleaning and freshning, and every available prettiness brought to light to gladden the coming day.

The ancestral silver was shining and the bleaching linen breathed the clover's sweet breath all in honor of the occasion.

Darby and Joan had every day for a week given extra care to their fur, that was now in a

state of glossy elegance, which nothing but vanity's ambition could produce. Sandy quite understood his duties, as his conduct and appearance testified, and by running in with a white rose in his mouth and laying it gently in his mistress' lap, a volume of meaning to them both was conveyed.

The day at last arrived—a glorious one—with all its bright promise, and the lake, not over a stone's throw from Aunt Faith's cottage, glistened and sparkled in the sunlight, its waters covered with lily pads, in full bridal array, in honor of Aunt Faith and Silas.

A little boat lay moored to its mossy bank, peacefully awaiting a friendly occupant—all nature, in fact, joyous and gay, in best bib and tucker, every flower holding its head up, proud to do her service.

Upstairs on her grandmother's chair hung the dainty white dimity dress that Mandy and she had spent happy hours making, most simple in style, like dear Aunt Faith herself. White ribbons and a bobinette veil, brought to light from an old trunk consigned to the attic many years ago, and worn by nobody knows how many female ancestors, completed her bridal attire.

The veil, to be surmounted by a crown of apple

blossoms, a real work of art made by Silas' deft, loving hands for his bride—his other offering he had just brought—his picture, taken by the village photographer, mounted in a carved wood frame.

Replying to his inquiry as to what further service he could be, she suggested that some water lilies would adorn their chancel prettily, and wondered if he would fetch her some.

So simple a request appeared insufficient in the light of the great service he was willing to do for her, so he set out most cheerfully to comply.

She watched at the window for his return, until the time dragged so wearily in wonderment as to what kept him, never dreaming of the immutability of God's laws.

Here let a tear fall and your heart throb in sympathetic pity for dear Aunt Faith, for in Silas' eager effort to recover some lilies which had fallen overboard, just where the water was deepest, he lost his balance, fell in and sank to the bottom, never, for some fortuitous reason, to rise again.

It would appear as if it were Aunt Faith's mission to be waiting and watching for her lover, and little did she dream on this her wedding day she must wait in vain.

If chance, indeed, have no existence, and fate be but a pagan doctrine, whence spring these strange and apparently unimportant happenings on whose very triviality rest future weal and woe?

Never had he failed her before, and her womanly instinct told her there was something amiss.

The pond but a step, she summoned Mandy and Sandy and went in quest of her lover, who was never again to look into her eyes. Fearfully she scanned the lake's surface and espied the boat gently floating on its tranquil mirror as though not guilty of so great a tragedy.

Life is like this tranquil lake; pictured on the ripples, however, sleep the shadows. Alas a day! that poor Faithie's Si should have been the shadow on this lake's history.

The lilies which filled the boat to the brim, procured in the fulfillment of her last request, mocked her in their white beauty, and when the truth flashed upon her in its full meaning, her frantic efforts to procure help brought aid to the crushed and widowed woman.

They found him at the bottom of the lake, with the faded flower in his buttonhole, placed there by Aunt Faith with her betrothal kiss, his face in peaceful repose, as if he had repeated

what Aunt Faith had taught him—"that it was so much better to meet God as *friends*."

They carried him tenderly and placed him amid the lilies he had unknowingly gathered for his own bier, in the boat bearing his sweetheart's name, "Faith," an appropriate tomb for the dear old soul, who had lived and died for *his* Faith.

Many gentle hands bore him to the little church, Faith, Mandy and Sandy followed with bent heads—all save Aunt Faith with streaming eyes, for not a tear could she shed, so great was her sorrow.

Death is a leveler of all things, great and small, and, strange to relate, Faith and Silas found themselves together (as the others had, out of respect, withdrawn their services, and Mandy had gone to care for the home, expecting to return to her mistress); yes, found themselves alone, taking their last farewell, in the church they thought they had outgrown and of what dear benefit now!

Aunt Faith remained with her dead praying and watching, never allowing so much as a drop of water to pass her lips until, on raising her head after hours of grief, she caught sight of her dear old Sandy sitting on his hind legs, bearing in his mouth a basket filled with dainties from

thoughful Mandy's hands, who deemed that entreaty a stronger one than any other she could devise.

This loyal act of friendship and Sandy's mute appeal for her to eat, and his own unhappy appearance overcame the poor little woman, and she relieved her pent-up sorrow in tears, the first vouchsafed her, and eat she did—how could she resist while dear Sandy almost forgot in his joy that he ought to be a very heart-broken dog.

Could you have peeped inside those portals at the touching scene it would never die in memory, for there knelt Aunt Faith and Sandy, with their loved one between them, weeping and eating in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

They buried him in his simple resting place, nothing save a white cross covered with morning glories to mark the spot which bore the touching words:

"Silas Martin, from his loving wife."

Thus unwittingly did this simply-reared village woman emulate the great Sir Joshua Reynolds, desiring to go down to posterity on the hem of Silas' garment.

For hadn't this woman made him what he was, and this unselfish act—caring only to be known as Si's "loving wife"—proved that it is not culture alone which begets true sentiment, for loving hearts are akin in palace or hut.

Love is the one thing needful for us poor mortals in our earthly pilgrimage, the one star to guide us through earth's labyrinths, and in loving one another we learn to love Him who taught us to love—this taken from her, Faith's life's mission was o'er—as forgetfulness is not always possible, even when most desired, as a

great love, like a great wrong, will often throw its shadow across a whole existence. Fate guides a loom whose mechanism we know not of, and they say Dr. Time has an ointment for all wounds, but he had failed to successfully diagnose Aunt Faith's fate line.

The world held naught but memories now for dear Aunt Faith, and she grew daily thinner and more wan, while good, faithful Mandy feared for her reason, as never a word did she utter, not even to Sandy, her faithful friend, but wandered listlessly and aimlessly about the house, and Mandy worried more than aught else, that Aunt Faith no longer knelt at the little chancel, and the morning glories would have died but for her watchful care; notwithstanding, they clung loyally to their abiding place, awakening and sleeping, unmindful of the great tragedy they were born and nurtured soon to witness.

CHAPTER IX.

It was just one month since Aunt Faith had buried her loved one, and she spoke for the first time since then almost cheerfully to Mandy telling her that she had been a good girl in all her trouble, and she thought needed a holiday.

"Go to your mother's, Mandy, for a day or two, Sandy and I will keep house until your return."

Mandy, of course, demurred, thinking that Aunt Faith required her services more than ever but Aunt Faith's decided answer was law, and most reluctantly she packed a carpet satchel and donning her black dress, made a mental note of the fact "that it was always wise to wear a black one a-goin' to see relatives, for you never knew just what was goin' to happen before you returned." The sudden turn in the tide of their home life certainly fully justified her precaution. After the last good-byes were said, Aunt Faith watched her until out of sight (a most unlucky omen, they say!)

With tears trickling down the pale, delicate

face, she turned, locked the door, called Sandy to her side, and, holding his face between her hands, said:

"Faithful Sandy, you and I have a task to perform; will you help me?"

No human being could have expressed his willingness more readily than did this dumb friend—only too happy to be reinstated on speaking terms.

Quietly but with such method as if her task had been planned beforehand, Aunt Faith stepped into the living room with its sweet sanctuary for the first time since her wedding day.

She carried in her hand Silas' picture, and reverently placed it above the cross, fastening it with a true lovers' knot of ribbon. Then gently she placed Spot in the open window and arranged with care a white ribbon bow around his neck, giving him a most ministerial appearance. Sandy looked on in wonderment, not even a sniff to question his beloved mistress' actions, which was especially commendable, for he seemed so much more to feel the responsibility of it all without Mandy's guiding influence.

She imagined, while leaving the room, she heard Spot muttering those two bars of the wedding march. Still she was fanciful to-day.

Glancing swiftly around to satisfy herself with the completeness of her task, she mounted the stairs in a still more mystifying manner, Sandy following in her wake, Darby and Joan close seconds. The heart has reasons that reason does not know, so what followed Aunt Faith's heart alone could reveal.

A burst of heaven's sunshine flooded the quaint but now sepulchral home, and the old grandfather's clock in all its years of service had never tolled its twelve sonorous chimes so mournfully as it now did at this moment, adding to and intensifying the silence, as a most unusual procession could be seen coming down the winding stairs, Aunt Faith leading, dressed in her bridal robes, her maidenly cap cast aside for the first time in many a year, her curls hanging in loving profusion around her wan face, glad at their freedom into the sunlight.

Resting on these dear curls lay the crown of apple blossoms fastened to the old veil, the saddest bit of romance of it all, as every blossom, black and withered, seemed strangely out of keeping with the freshness and daintiness of her attire. Her little white slippers peeped out from under her dainty gown, apparently jealous

that no one was looking at them, and they looking their very best.

An old-fashioned and well-worn hymn book was tightly clasped in her hands as she walked straight forward and steadfastly toward the little chanceled railing. Darby and Joan, beflowered and beribboned, following in silence. Sandy in all the glory of his own vanity, his glossy, beautiful hair brushed and parted, a little coat fitting his figure and buttoning down the front with a large white rose in his buttonhole, completed a most striking outfit. As this queer procession entered the door, Spot, imbued with the idea that it was her turn to do something, seeing her companions so imposingly taking part in the ceremony and knowing that she had been readmitted to this sacred place for some wise purpose, overcame her long and persistent refusal and sang out at the top of her voice in a most unmusical manner, the two bars of the wedding march.

At the sound of these weird tones, Aunt Faith smiled in acknowledgment as she passed with Sandy close by her side as "best man."

She walked to the chancel, knelt before the beloved picture, glanced at the book and commenced in solemn tones, her eyes still riveted on

her beloved's face, her words coming low and clear: "Silas Martin, do you take this woman to be your wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this time forward, forever more?" "I will!" floated on the air, and did only the angels hear and record it or did Aunt Faith's ready ear, too, catch the sound? for she raised her eyes once more very lovingly and again her voice chanted: "Faith Randall, do you take this man to be your wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this time forward forever more?" and the gentle answer came so faint that only the morning glories caught, "*until death do us join.*"

Awful was the silence as the head bent lower and lower, finally resting on the dear old Bible—a most fitting pillow—one that chronicled her advent into this world and had witnessed her going out. The air grew stiller and stiller, the sunshine and flowers in strange contrast with the darkness and sadness within.

Good old Sandy impatiently awaited his dear mistress' amen! Awaited in vain, as she had gone to meet Si in her wedding dress and withered crown (like her hopes) with her marriage vows freshly given—she died as she lived, surrounded by her pets—with the sunshine and morning glories, as on the blossom of her

thoughts no snow had ever fallen, and worn out with life's unanswered questions, this quaint sweet, pure-souled woman passed away, her "best man" at her side, faithfully awaiting her gentle amen!

And in memory's wreath let there be entwined by loving hands, one leaf for Si and Faithie.

The subject of this Allegory was suggested by the wonderful advancement of women in the past few years - their severed chains of bondage placing them on a mental footing with men -

These tremendous strides have been attained only by the herculean efforts of women themselves - inspired by the Divine Hand and immense possibilities whose realities they have succeeded so marvelously in mastering -

They have found "the light" and may its radiance be the incentive to still greater and nobler things in the future for them.

Janet Lake.

THE DEVIL'S WIFE

(An Allegory).

THE DEVIL'S WIFE.

(An Allegory.)

The roaring of wild beasts and tortured souls suggested a torment that should cause guilty souls to pause in their evil thoughts.

Owls flew by screeching and hooting, and wretched spirits wandered aimlessly about, rending the air with their agonized cries, while he, the master of them all, sat silently playing his game of chess, which he had now but a few hours to finish.

Crouching near by in this grewsome place was a woman, whose despairing eyes watched with spell-bound fascination the gloating, malignant expression of the fiend who continued heedless of her presence.

The space they occupied seemed vast and limitless, the deepest darkness surrounding them—all confusion and night.

In front of him, suspended in air, hung a ball

of fire, its weird, phosphorescent light disclosing to his wife his hideous, baffled face.

On the surface of this ball (his Fata-Morgana, his chessboard of life) appeared tiny moving figures, reflections of the unsuspecting victims he so greedily tried to gather in for future glory and delectation before the year was spent, but, for some hidden reason, was thwarted in doing.

These chess men he dextrously manipulated to suit fancy and mood, until he met a valiant knight, who frustrated his devilish attack. Then that ferocious look, surcharged with awful meaning, that has portended evil to thousands, came into his eyes, and, with a frenzied roar, he acknowledged his defeat.

With insatiable desire he started in to secure, if possible, more hapless souls—women—"Yes, women!" he cried, with a sinister smile, rubbing his hands gleefully together, "they are easy prey to revenge the insult to my authority."

But even he, the wily devil, reckoned without his host in that derisive threat, for woman (that easy prey) was the queen this year to cause him the most ignominious defeat he had yet encountered.

The imminent danger of these poor souls (threatened by that fateful roar that the brave

wife had learned to know the meaning of too well) touched in her that sympathetic chord which forms the strongest tie between heaven and earth, and, rushing unheeded by him into the still greater gloom, she crawled on hands and knees up from what seemed to be a bottomless pit, to find assistance, but from whom she knew not.

Looking upward she espied a tiny star, whose purity of light riveted her to the spot. With uplifted hands she cried: "Oh, beautiful star! Shed your light on me, and give me power to aid these perishing souls this night."

It appeared to twinkle a ready response, and, like an eager child, she tried to grasp and hold it for her own, her heart bounding with mingled relief and gratitude. But the higher she climbed the further off seemed her desired object, until she fell back in despair, with an agonized cry, as she supposed, into the chasm of chaos below.

Recovering her senses, the star seemed to approach nearer and nearer—so near, that once again she sought with renewed hope to possess it, but alas! to her bitter disappointment, it vanished, leaving, however, an effulgent light which revealed stepping stones, slippery with the dampness of age.

The light became brighter with each step *forward*, and a friendly foothold appeared to aid her in her perilous ascent.

"This is not my lord's domain; surely I must have traveled beyond his limits, fascinated by this glorious star, as all my lord's pathways lead *downward*."

She reflected for a moment upon this novel situation, and a longing, born of the noble impulse to save this perishing humanity, caused her to struggle on still further.

Upon reaching the summit the star, with its opalescent light, had vanished from sight, dimmed by a divine figure surrounded by a halo of light in dazzling brilliance, that blinded her whom only darkness had nurtured. Becoming accustomed to this Divine Presence, she beheld the sweeest, gentlest smile that ever illumined a beautiful face. This was a king—a mighty king—in whom she recognized her real master—oh! so different from the grim, repulsive features of her lord.

He extended His hands in welcome to this struggling soul coming from such an abyss, but she hung her head, and, prostrating herself at his feet, there consecrated her future allegiance to Him—her master found at last.

In a most mellifluous voice He exclaimed: "Arise! fear not, my child; look Me in the face. I am thy Father; trust in Me; thou hast come to Me of thine own free will and hast sought 'the light,' and gladly will I help thee."

"Oh, my Father! Now that I have found Thee, protect and give me strength to combat the evil of my husband, who has held me in bondage all these ages, keeping me in ignorance of Thy true self. 'Rest Thy hand on my brow and give me peace.'"

"Yes, dear child, thy Father is ever ready and eager to receive His children, if they but lift up their hands and hearts to reach 'the star.' But thou hast never until now sought it, and why, my child?"

"Because Father, my lord, is more absorbed than ever this year with his game of life, and I escaped unnoticed. It must be that Thou hast impelled me hither that I dared incur his wrath, and I thank Thee for these few sweet moments of respite from him whom I now see in all his monstrosity."

"Think not so grievously of thy husband, child, his trials and temptations involve grave responsibilities. The antiquity of his sins has inured him to the darkness in which he constantly

dwells, never having accepted the blessedness of repentance, which tempers all things to the shorn lamb. So, perhaps, wert thou to return with this new-found light of thine, he might be led by thy gentle, loving influence to reach 'the star.'"

"Send me not back, oh, Mighty King! For my lord cannot fail to see this new-born light in my eyes, and in punishment will hurl me to the depths of hell for braving his displeasure."

"My child, he shall dominate thee no more. From this moment thou art a free agent, as upon thy brow I place this circlet—a crown to bear testimony to thy perseverance in seeking and finding 'the light,' bequeathed through thee, my most glorious creation, the mother of men. Each year I divulge and consecrate a truth to enlighten my children, as it is not wise to bestow them all at once; thus with this gift do I intrust thee, in commemoration of my natal day."

"Thou speakest, oh Master, as simply as a little child."

"Simplicity, my dear, is the wisest interpreter of truth; many a faith has been wrecked upon the rhetoric of ignorance. Truth is ever simple, and the way to find Me still more so; only lift up thy heart and hands and thou wilt surely reach Me."

"Without Thy presence, oh beloved Master, I shall once more become his slave."

"No, thou wilt conquer. I have declared it; go forth and strive."

"But should I fail?"

She eagerly awaited His reply, and, timidly glancing up, found herself alone, save the twinkling star, which was again shedding its light into the abyss down which she was destined to return. Once having seen the light, she found it a more difficult task, but her new power strengthened her to brave all things, so she hastened on, flying over the steps to accomplish her errand of mercy, ere it was too late. A strange light from the circlet cast its radiance, penetrating the darkness and facilitating her progress in reaching the depths of the awful abyss of woe. There still sat in deepest contemplation the master of this realm of night, grinning darkly and forebodingly, sullenly watching the game which he was bending every sardonic and ghoulish energy to win, unmindful, as usual, of the approach of the woman whom he called wife. He was muttering derisively:

"One game each year, and always beaten at that, with every year lessening my chance of final victory. By the powers of hell, this year's

game shall be mine, but some subtle power at work looks menacing, and I fear disaster in the end. Heretofore difficult life problems have been unraveled by me with phenomenal success. Am I losing my cunning and the power I have always wielded? The King is my goal! Yes, He is the deadly foe, the usurper of my rights, that I wish to capture, and have been fighting for over 1,800 years to checkmate, but further off than ever seems the possibility to-night. The Castles in past games have been captured readily enough through the weakness of their Knights, but the Bishops have always, as to-day, been my strongest adversaries, they having remained, in spite of my herculean efforts to wipe them off the board of life. Now there arises a stronger foe than even these stately Bishops and valiant Knights, the Queen, never before for me was she an important factor in the contest, but to-day she is an antagonist who has evidently been underestimated in the consciousness I had of her utter helplessness. What caprice of fortune has wrought this change? Is it that the Knights, in their defeat of past centuries, have had to call her to their defense, or has she made her value understood by her hidden strength, in patiently biding her time and opportunity? Humph! By

the powers, I am no such poltroon as to acknowledge defeat to a woman, and will fight her tooth and nail; the cloven foot, I swear, still retains its awful sway. As for the Pawns—bah!"

He raised his hand in contemptuous wrath, his whole being consumed by the evil intent to obliterate them from even memory, and, arrested by impending disaster, exclaimed in bitter tones:

"There she is—this Queen—standing her ground, and quietly but surely fighting her way through them all, not the least intimidated by my best devised attacks. She it is who threatens my annihilation, and works this mischief in my domain, making the Castle and its King more difficult of approach than ever, and I, her powerful lord and master, tremble at her power—and hers alone. That Star of Bethlehem! which shines so brightly, mocking me in its intensity, interfering with my moves and glorying in my downfall just at the fateful finish of each year's game! Zounds! May the fates be cast to the winds, for, old fellow, you are losing your nerve, and must exert every energy to arrest this threatened invasion—woman—but how?"

And while thinking out this new problem he attacked the unwary Pawns, and buffeted them

about with a zest and joy that only the devil could indulge himself in.

But there stood the Queen, not relinquishing a vantage gained; her Bishops playing no minor part in defeating this, Satan's greatest game—that of '98.

This Queen had come to save the honor of her King, and nobly did she acquit herself, hurling defiance at her mighty foe; as he made his final effort and the hour approached for unconditional surrender, he uttered a curse which rent the heavens in its fury, clutching vainly at the vanishing panorama, the torture of it all too great for him to bear as the pleading voice of his wife arrested his fury.

"Oh! Your Majesty, have mercy upon your victims; release them before the midnight stroke heralds our coming year! Give them back their liberty, poor, tortured souls; set them free, and hearken unto me; it is not yet too late for *you* to become the greatest of all Kings. Think what your renunciation of evil would mean to your subjects—peace, harmony, your claim to be the greatest of all conquerors, and the reward of joining hands with the Sovereign Master, whom I have met at last.

"Hold, woman! Are you mad, that you thus

speak His name and defy my power? What has come to you or to me? Am I bereft of my senses, together with this overwhelming defeat?"

Striking a defiant attitude, he bent upon her that masterful gaze which had heretofore dominated her; but she arose in all the majesty of her determination and silenced him into wonder, saying:

"Yes. He is all love and forgiveness, and is only waiting to take you by the hand and greet you if you but seek the 'light.' He bade me tell you this."

Great was the anguish for the moment of this mighty fallen monarch, as he realized the power of her, whom until now he had thought but a mere puppet in his hands, and would instantly have destroyed her had not some hidden power paralyzed his every nerve and sinew.

When his mind awoke from its stupor he bellowed forth:

"Yes, I know it all now; it is to you, to you, woman, that I owe this fall. I have felt its baneful influence, but never did I dream of tracing it to you, as I have rested happy in the knowledge that you were but a tool, a necessary evil, until now, too late, I learn my error. I curse you and

the day that I ever plotted for you. Leave my sight, fiend that you are, and depart to the loneliest depths, there to remain until your lord and master recalls you."

"No; my *master* no longer! Light, truth and liberty of thought are my masters hereafter, given to me with this circlet as a sacred trust by the Master of us all."

"I defy you, woman! Father Time has not yet severed with his scythe the waning from the future year; and I still have time to checkmate your King. So, begone, and do not detain me!"

"Stand back, evil one. You have at last pronounced your own sentence. Woman has guarded her King and defeated you, aided and sustained by a greater power than yours. You have held her in subjection for these centuries past, and now, released from bondage by her own achievements, she is going forth to battle for her fellow men, as she has seen the star of Bethlehem and knows the power of its shining glory which will shed every tiny sparkle of its light over the New Year—consigning you to still greater darkness and despair unless you try to reach it. I have been asleep numbed by your thralldom, but the Master's hand has awakened me through the light of that "little star" of the

East, and you are powerless to destroy. Look upon me and learn your fate unless you do my bidding. Upon my brow rests this circlet—emblem of a vow by me—to redeem the world. A symbol given by the Master as a charm against your evil machinations. You thought to crush me, but the Master's bishops have made too vigorous an attack upon your citadel this year by choosing so strong an ally as the 'devil's wife'—and you are vanquished through her enlightenment.

"Hearken unto those bells! ringing the New Year in and signalling the liberation of the souls you have for years enslaved."

As the last stroke of heaven's bell announcing the New Year smote his ear he glanced about him in baffled, pitiful quest for the fate of his Fata Morgana. Cringing in terror, he became conscious of only darkness and chaos, while the profound silence awed him into cowardly fear of his approaching destiny: As he looked upward for its mystic solution he beheld a beautiful vision—the woman who was once his slave—ascending from view, her finger pointing upward, a star resting poised on her brow, the one that shone over 1800 years ago on Bethlehem,

the same which puzzled the three wise men of the East, and still puzzles the wisest of this age, proclaiming, with the coming of '98, a new saviour—woman.

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